

## A Love Story Told in Five Parts by lollercakes

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**Summary:**

The five times Hopper and Joyce used letters to convey things they couldn't put into words.

## A Love Story Told in Five Parts

*Joycie, Mom says your Oma's sick.*

*Are you okay? Do you want to come over tonight?*

*We can make up Grandpa's cot in the garage*

*and you can stay with us until your Mom comes back.*

*Jimmy*

He watched from the back of the room as the note made its way to his friend's desk, the kids in his class not even bothering to look at the folded page with any interest. Chewing on his pencil, anxious, he waits as Benny Hammond looks back at him and tilting his head toward Joycie on his other side. Jimmy nods and tries to look busy as Benny slips the note onto Joycie's desk with a small tap of her shoulder drawing her attention away from the window.

The girl is quick to read through his chicken scratch handwriting, spinning in her seat to catch his eye with a frown. She was always frowning lately and he hated it.

With a small shake of her head, she scribbles a response and folds the letter back into a square. Getting up from her chair and heading towards the doorway in the back she drops the note on his desk before leaving the classroom without a word.

*Oma is sending me to Chicago tonight.*

*I don't know when I'll be back.*

Picking up the paper with shaking hands, his face falls as he reads her response through once, twice, three times before it really sinks in. Glancing up towards Mr Edwards, Jimmy eases to his feet and beelines to the hallway, desperate to catch her before she gets so far ahead that he can't catch up.

Twisting through the hallways with an urgency in his step, he comes up short when finds he her tucked up against her locker, scuffing her shoes against the ground. The usual smile that she saves just for him, the secret one that only he knows about, is nowhere to be found as she looks up at him and turns the bracelets on her wrist sharply.

"You're leaving?" Jimmy asks with a crack in his voice, careful to give her the space she prefers when they're at school. He wishes then that they were having this conversation anywhere else - somewhere he could wrap his arm around her shoulders the way he sees his Dad do to his Mom when she's upset.

"Yes. Oma's going to the home so she's sending me to visit Aunt Ruth for a while," she replies, not once meeting his eyes.

"Can't she wait until your Mom comes back? She's never gone this long, she'll probably be back this week and then you don't have to leave," he counters with a groan, his chest aching when her gaze finally connects with his.

Shaking her head, she sighs and wraps her arms around her chest. “She doesn’t think she’s coming back this time which is why I can’t stay.”

“This isn’t fair, Joycie. You shouldn’t have to go. I’ll talk to my Mom. I’m sure she’ll let you - “

“Jimmy,” she interjects, pulling him up short as the tears pop at the corner of her eyes. He breaks their rule and steps towards her, his hand landing on her shoulder as his head dips to look at her, her strength crumbling before him.

“I don’t want you to go,” he admits quietly, pleading with his eyes for her to stay. As if she had any choice in her Oma being sick, or her Mom for running off with another boyfriend she met at the bar one night.

“I should go,” Joycie mumbles and swallows her tears. Standing up straight she steps out of his grip and wipes her eyes, steeling herself for a future she has no say in.

He barely has a chance to say goodbye before she’s ducking past him and disappearing around the corner. He stands there stunned until the bell rings, his heart hollowed out as his best friend leaves him behind.

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*I*

*Love*

*You*

The words are traced out along her skin, burning as his finger trails across her exposed back. The night is warm and balmy and the forest that surrounds them is thick and creaking with the soft breeze that fills the air.

Joyce had come back the summer before senior year, her mom having dragged her back to town claiming she'd changed and that her daughter needed her mother. Neither Joyce nor her Aunt Ruth had actually believed it but they hadn't fought it either. Secretly, ever since leaving in middle school she'd wanted to come back and see Jimmy, now going by Hopper, one more time.

And see him she had. He hadn't known she'd come back until the first week of school and the look on his face when he saw her across the cafeteria had made her breath catch. He'd stood up from his seat with a shot, spilling his lunch and staring at her until a wide smile broke out across his face.

Their friendship had rekindled with secret meetings under the bleachers, communal smoke breaks and nostalgic conversation that had brought them closer than ever. Somehow by the winter Snow Ball that year they were sneaking into bed together, finding themselves in more ways than just with words.

She didn't regret coming back at all, especially not now in the bed of his Dad's truck, curled together as the stars hung brightly overhead. The school year was nearly out and though the future was uncertain, Joyce knew that the feelings they both had were stronger than ever.

Looking at up him with wide eyes, her gaze steady, Hopper shifts and tries to hide the telling expression on his face. She absorbs the feel of it and pushes down all the thoughts that tangle up in her mind, focusing on this boy who has her heart.

"Was this your plan all along?" She teases lightly, capturing his hand in her small fist and dragging it between them.

"Jeez, do you take me for a sex mastermind?" He laughs and pulls the blanket that has settled over their waists up to her shoulders protectively.

"Hop, you said we were going out to get ice cream and this is definitely not that."

"Personally, this beats the hell out of frozen milk product any day of the week. And besides that, I would gladly argue you're a snack, Joycie," he replies, invoking his childhood name for her with a look of mirth that twinkles in the moonlight. Joyce shakes her head and rolls onto her back, pulling his arm with her so that it covers the better part of her chest.

"You haven't called me that since middle school, I thought you'd done me a favour and forgotten it," her voice lilts as she looks back at him. He grins sheepishly and shifts until his chin is resting on her

breastbone, his eyes locked on her.

"I remember the last time I called you that too. You were leaving for Chicago and I didn't think you'd ever come back. It was the worst feeling," Hopper confides before absently running his hand down her waist. She sighs at the contact, goosebumps rising from her skin as the memory floods through her.

She remembers that day vividly, the way it felt to walk away from him and the heavy weight that had landed on her chest when she started to cry in the bushes off the parking lot. That moment had haunted her dreams and while she didn't want to admit it, she was afraid of how the loss of him had made her feel even after all these years.

"I didn't think I'd *be* back," she sighs and lifts her hand to his brow, face brightening more with every second. "But I'm glad I'm here. Cause if I wasn't, I wouldn't get to do this..." A cheeky look passes over her features as her hand slips down his side and wraps around his length.

Hissing, he jerks at her touch and leans up to meet his lips with hers. "You're playing with fire," he says in between stuttered breaths, palms coming up to cup her face. His hips roll against her and she groans at the feel of him surrounding her, covering and warming her.

"I can handle it," Joyce replies before moving to straddle him, the blanket slipping from her shoulders and exposing her to the warm night air. His hands settle on her waist as she lifts to slip him inside, the groan escaping from him.

“Joy,” he moans and pulls her down to him, chest to chest and skin to skin. His arms wrap around her back, locking her to him as his lips slide against hers. Holding himself steady, he waits for her breathing to even out before he lifts his hips to meet hers over and over again.

They move together slowly, dragging out the feel of being joined as their skin lights and fades with every touch. When Joyce lifts herself to lean back, stretching and gasping, she pulls him up with her until his forehead is resting against her collar, stubble scraping across her breasts.

“Hop,” Joyce whispers when his breathing starts to catch, his fingers gripping her waist until they nearly bruise. Slowing at her words, his gaze slinks up to hers before his hands follow, cupping her face in his palms.

“I - “ he starts, stops, captures her lips with his.

“I know,” she replies and lets her hands grapple over his shoulders and down to his hips, signalling him to roll her onto her back. They come together in a hot mess of limbs, Hopper’s hips driving into her until he comes with a grunt and a moan, curling his torso to hold her closer.

Neither of them dare to speak as their breathing returns to normal, skin cooling with the night air as the second round leaves them spent. When it eventually comes time to redress and return home they take their time, their hands never straying far from each other’s touch as they climb onto the bench of the truck. In the driveway of Joyce’s childhood home he pulls her against him, lips meeting as her fingers trace the words she cannot say across his back in return.

*I*

*Love*

*You*

*Too*

---

*Joy,*

*It's been two months since we last talked. It's really starting - I've written you letters. I've called. I don't know what happened - if I made you mad or you're still upset that I went to Vietnam - but I want it to be fixed now. I hear you're doing okay - Benny did a bit of spy work before he got shipped out - but it's not enough for me. I miss you. I need you. Are you afraid that I won't come back? Because I will. I promise I will. The guys here, I showed them a picture of you and they swore they'd help me get home to you. Shit is so heavy here, Joy. The stuff I've seen - I can't put it into words. I just - I love you. Please write me back. Please.*

*Hop*

The letter arrives the same day as her check up, it's crushed envelope poking out of her mailbox and making the dread settle in her stomach. She grabs the paper with the tips of her fingers and holds it as though it's a bomb, setting it down on her bed before curling up

amongst her pillows.

“How was your appointment?” Her mother asks from the frame of her bedroom door, arms crossed over her chest as she watches Joyce’s expression fall.

“I had a miscarriage Mom, not cancer,” she hisses and curls a pillow into belly. Her mood shifts as she glares at the paper, wishing it would just disappear and leave her to her misery.

“Are you hungry?” She asks after a drawn out silence, careful to give her daughter the space she so clearly wanted.

“No. I’ll find something to eat later,” Joyce replies lowly and gives her mother a dismissive look. With a sigh and a flip of her hands, her mother disappears from the doorway and leaves Joyce to stare at the letter with a growing ache in her chest.

Later, when she finally gets up the strength to read the damn thing she rips open the flap hastily and tears the corner of the page, sobbing dryly as his words break apart in her fingers. She makes an effort to move more carefully then, unfurling the letter and allowing the words to wash over her. His plea for her to talk to him again, to acknowledge the feelings that bleed through his words, riddles through her until she’s clambering to her desk and pulling out a pen and paper.

*Hop,*

*I need you to come back -*

She drops the pen and crumples the paper in her fist, tossing it into the garbage can before collapsing into a heap on her bed and letting the tears overcome her.

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*Hopper,*

*I know we haven't really kept in touch - that's my fault - but I heard about Sara and Diane everything that's going on and I wanted to let you know I'm here if you ever want to talk.*

*Joyce*

She tapes the letter to the door of his trailer after knocking three times, all to no avail. She'd known it was a long shot coming out here - he was probably at work or at the bar - but she didn't know what else to do. Short of going up to him in the street and stopping him dead in his tracks she was out of options to let him know she was there for him.

Jesus. What was she even thinking? She couldn't be that person for him - she was still with Lonnie, married and stuck. She couldn't be his oathkeeper but she also couldn't stand by and watch him run

himself into the ground in the way Benny had described it a couple days ago.

Since coming back to Hawkins Hopper had been the talk of the town, all wounded soul and drowning his sorrows in every drink and open pair of legs that he could find. She didn't begrudge him for that, not really. He'd lost the only child he'd ever known and she knew from experience that there was nothing that would heal that wound but time.

Piling back into her car, she watches anxiously as the letter flutters in the wind, taunting her as she jerks the car into reverse before starting down the long driveway. She was nearly back on the road when the Chief's truck turned into the drive, blocking her escape route.

"Fuck," she hisses, gripping the steering wheel in her hands as he eases the truck up beside her, rolling down his window.

"Joyce?" He calls over the dull roar of the engine, face unreadable behind the sunglasses and hat overshadowing his face. Despite everything she'd heard these past months - and she'd heard a lot at Melvald's as the town's gossip central - he looked good. A bit worn for wear, but still having aged well.

"Hey Chief, sorry - I think I got turned around!" She lies, shifting in her seat. "I was on my way to pick-up my son from a friend's house and thought this was one of the old logging roads. I have to get going though - I'm already late. See you later?"

His frown is visible and growing as he nods reluctantly, the knuckles

on his fist whitening on the wheel. “Yeah, okay. Whatever. Have a good evening.”

Letting out a breath she didn’t realize she was holding, Joyce takes off out of his driveway and heads towards town trying desperately to clamp down her warring thoughts. Confused, miserable and bitter, she stumbles into her house to find Lonnie already railing against Jonathan in the living room, cheeks flushed with drink.

“Leave him alone!” She growls protectively, stepping between the two and holding her hands out ahead of her to keep Lonnie at bay. Behind her Jonathan holds onto her coattails, his thin frame almost hidden behind hers.

“Get out of the way, Joyce. That boy is a menace! Little bastard threw my keys into the forest!” Lonnie slurs, fists tightening.

“So? You’re drunk! Again! You don’t need them tonight. You can dry out and find them in the morning.” Her voice rises an octave, the pent up emotions spilling out of her as her body tenses. He takes a step towards her then, breath hot on her cheeks.

“Mom...” Jonathan croaks, pulling her back instinctively.

“He had no right to do that and you know it! I’ll kill the - “ His threat is interrupted by a knock at the door, Karen Wheeler’s voice calling out through the heavy wood.

“Joyce? Is everything okay? I’ve got Will here - “ Karen shouts and knocks again, her shadow peeking through the windows.

Lonnie turns his glare towards the door, growling at the intrusion.  
“Get the - “

“Lonnie!” Joyce hisses and jolts towards him, stumbling back when his palm connects with her cheek. Shock and fear rattles through her as she pulls Jonathan against her, stunned and hyperventilating. She stares daggers at her husband, wishing with every fiber of her being that he would drop dead in this moment. When he doesn’t - when he continues to hiss under his breath at her - she sucks in some air and schools her expression, opening the door to her son and his friend’s nosy mother. “Karen - hi,” Joyce greets through swallowed tears, hoping the shadow from the shitty porch lighting Lonnie never fixed keeps the blossoming bruise out of sight.

“Joyce - “ Karen pauses and squints towards her, concern lacing her brow as Joyce realizes she’d heard everything.

“It’s fine. He’s just leaving for the night - “ As though on cue the back door snaps shut and Karen jolts at the sound, eyes wide. “Thank you for bringing Will home, we’ll see you later, okay?”

“Yes - let me know if you need anything?” Karen offers and gives a small wave as she reluctantly heads back to her car. Joyce watches her go, half of her wanting to shout out and the other half waiting for Lonnie to storm back in.

He doesn’t though and later that night she starts installing new slide

locks on all the doors. She's almost done - only two screws left - when she's startled by another knock at her door, this one louder and more insistent than Karen's from earlier.

"Who is it?" She asks steadily, trying to see out the windows but only catching shadows.

"Joyce, it's me. Open up." Hopper's familiar voice rings out, deep and measured, and it makes the hair on the back of her neck stand up.

"Hopper?" She opens the door slightly and looks through the crack, the bruised half of her face hidden by the frame as he stares down at her. The first thing she notices is that he looks different than he had this afternoon - more worn and tired - and she doesn't know whether to hope he's here because of the letter or because of Lonnie - neither scenario one that she was honestly interested in dealing with that night.

"Can I come in?" He asks quietly, hands digging into the pockets of his jeans. Joyce tries not to notice the way his flannel shirt fits him just right under his uniform jacket or the way his beard is just slightly unkempt enough to look disheveled.

"It's late - can we - " She starts but he sighs and pushes his hand against the door, stepping his foot into the door jam.

"Joyce, I don't want to do it this way but I just came from the station where one of my guys was filling out a report that Karen Wheeler filed. Let me in." He looks down at her, a glimmer of pain crossing his features as she lets him open the door wide enough to slip

through.

Twisting his hat in his hands, Hopper stands in her front entrance, eyes falling on everything else in the space but her.

“My boys are asleep,” Joyce whispers, crossing her arms over her chest and holding the screwdriver tighter in her hand. His gaze slides towards her then, eyebrows raised slightly until he spots the bruise colouring her cheek.

“Joy...” His voice breaks, his large frame looming over her as his hand ghosts across her skin. Reactively she steps away from him, her own hand coming up to block his touch.

“Why didn’t you tell me this was going on? I’m the Chief of Police, you know,” he adds and steps back to lean against the door, his pose belying the tension in his shoulders.

“This is the first time - “

“You don’t have to lie to me, Joyce. I know that’s what they all say and it doesn’t sound any more convincing coming from you. You deserve someone better,” Hopper interrupts and it’s the wrong thing to say to her that night.

She knows she deserves better. She knows she deserved *him*, but it was too late now. This is what she got for never writing him back and never telling him about everything that could have been. With her

heart seizing in her chest, Joyce blinks down at the floor until the tears stop welling in her eyes.

“Joyce,” Hopper whispers as his hands come to rest on her shoulders like they used to so long ago.

“You should go,” she replies, defeated. She can’t fight this battle anymore. This war between her past and her present, between what could have been and what was. She was too tired and all she wanted was to be a good mother to her boys.

Shaking his head, Hopper squeezes her shoulders and sighs, watching as her emotions play out across her features. When she doesn’t pull away from him he wraps her up in his arms, holding her tightly until her tears subside.

“I - “ he starts when she hiccups in a breath, his body stepping back to look at her fully. Slowly, he lifts his thumb to brush across her cheek. “If this happens again, you call me, okay? You call me.”

She nods and watches as his expression changes, his own sorrow and pain mixing in his brow before he returns his hat to his head. Reluctant, knowing he can’t offer anything more, he bids her goodnight and steps back into the evening air.

Just as he’s halfway to the driveway Joyce remembers the note she’d left him earlier that day, her words spilling past her lips before she can stop them. “Did you get my letter? Is that why you’re really here?” She has to ask, hoping she could eventually offer him some comfort in return.

Pausing his step, he pulls up short and turns back towards her, hands on his hips. "What letter?"

Shaking her head she mumbles, "Don't worry about it," and watches as he climbs into his truck and reverses down her driveway. What she doesn't notice as she steps back inside, locking the door behind her, is the way his truck idles just off the edge of the treeline before the engine turns off and the cab goes dark.

Lonnie doesn't come back that night, Hopper makes sure of it.

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*Joy, I took the kids out for breakfast. There's Advil and Gatorade on the bedside table. Get some sleep. We'll talk later. - Hop*

She struggles to read the note, her eyes crossing as the words fuzz on the page. When it gets too much to try to focus once more on his chicken scratch handwriting she rolls over and slaps her hand across the table until her fingers find the blue liquid and the pills. Swallowing them dry, Joyce groans when she finds the bottle still wrapped and far too difficult for her to manage in her hungover state.

Last night had been a mistake. A frustrating, drunken, foolish

mistake.

“Fuck,” she groaned and rolled to the edge of the bed, staring down at the bucket Hopper must have placed there and begging her body not to betray her. It taunted her as the cool press of the sheet on her cheek grounded her and slowed the spin of the room.

Joyce wasn’t sure exactly how it had all gone down. Her memories were vague at best, at worst they made her feel like her brain was a molding swiss cheese. All she knew for sure was that she’d fucked up somewhere between stumbling out of Karen Wheeler’s Fourth of July BBQ and into Hopper’s arms.

“Never should have brought him back here.” Her voice grated as she made another attempt at the Gatorade, her hands slipping on the plastic with a frustrated growl.

Tossing the bottle across the room in a fit, she chewed on her nail as she tried to recall just what had happened.

It came back to her in a wallop, the exhale bursting from her chest as she bit clear into the skin around her cuticle. They’d left the kids at the BBQ at Karen’s insistence, managing to get back to the house a bit more intoxicated than she’d realized. Hopper had settled onto the dining chair, hands busy with lighting up a cigarette, before she’d climbed onto his lap and surprised him with a kiss that knocked them both breathless.

Clambering into the bedroom they’d made quick work of their clothes, cotton layers discarded in a fury of spare limbs and bumped

elbows. When his mouth dragged over her newly exposed skin, his beard leaving a mark against her pale ribs, she sighed and tried not to spin too far out of control.

Teetering on the edge of something dangerous, Joyce leaned into him and moaned at every touch, every groan, that reverberated through him. She even let him steer her backwards towards the bed, nodding vigorously with every little check-in he offered and trying to slow the way her heart skipped from the look her gave her at every pause.

“I missed that noise you make,” Hopper whispered as he hovered above her a moment later, arms framing her head as his fingers brushed at her brow. “Are you sure this is okay?” He questioned again, his length hard at her hip and insistant in it’s reminder that he wanted her - and always had.

“Yes. There’s condoms in the side table - “ She replied and let her hands drift lazily back into his hair.

“Do we need - “ He started in between kisses along her collar.

“Yes - I’m not letting you knock me up twice - “ Her words died on her lips as she realized the mistake she’d made one second too late. She watched as his mind spun into overdrive, his brows knitting together as his body shifted and slowly started to tense above her.

“What did you say?” He questioned lowly, his breathing escaping him in puffs that made the hair around her face fly in all directions. She felt the bile rising in her throat as the drink mixed with the consuming anxiety that coursed through her.

Talking about this again had never been in the plan. She'd tried to forget it, tried to bury it in a place that it would never resurface, but she'd failed. There was no putting this beast back in the box. After all these years Joyce had convinced herself that it didn't matter - no baby had been born so there'd been nothing really to explain - but as she looked up at him through the fading light she knew she'd been wrong as a cold feeling began to creep through her chest.

"Joyce, what did you say?" Hopper repeated and pushed himself up until he was sitting back on his calves and staring down at her, a shadow forming over his features.

"The last time... We didn't use a condom - right before you went off to 'Nam - I got pregnant - "

"Jonathan?" Hopper gasped, his math skills desperately trying to put the pieces together.

"No - " She shook her head and sat up in an attempt to stop the room from spinning. "He was later. No - this - I..."

"Did you end - I mean, did - " He tries to string the sentence together but fails and rubs his hands in his eyes before running them harshly through his hair.

"I had a miscarriage, Hop," she admits quietly, eyes closed to slow the ache trembling through her.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Hopper questions and reaches a hand out towards her. He lets it drop before it makes contact, changing his mind as she shakes her head at his question. Groaning, she tucks her head into her knees defensively and wishes she was sober enough to think this all through properly. “Joyce, dammit - is that why you quit talking to me? Did you not think I would have been there for you if I’d been home?”

“You were at war! I couldn’t put that shit on you. And besides, it’s not like you could have done anything to help from eight thousand miles away - ” Joyce adds and works harder not to look at him in that moment. She knows that if she did, if she looked up at him then, she’d start to cry.

“I still - you should have told me. I would have come back after if I’d known why you’d disappeared on me. Instead I just had to think for the last few decades that you hated me. Do you know how fucking hard that - no. Nevermind. I’m too drunk to talk about this with you now so I’m going to sleep on the floor tonight. We can talk about this in the morning.”

She watched numbly while he stood up and pulled his pants back on, his feet stumbling as he grabbed for a pillow and the spare blanket they’d knocked onto the floor. The distance between them grew like a chasm as he settled down next to the bed, his body facing away and shoulders at his ears.

“Hop,” she whispered, hands coming to grip the edge of the bed as she looked down at him. Not five minutes ago they’d been skin to skin, now it was as though he was in Siberia for the way he huddled away from her.

“Go to sleep Joy,” he mumbled into the pillow, rustling the blankets closer. It was the quiet sob that finally made him turn over and run his hand through her hair, eyes softening. “Rest. It’s okay.”

“I tried to tell you,” she stuttered. Sighing, he climbed unsteadily back to his feet and crawled onto the bed beside her, opening his arms to her.

“Let’s talk in the morning, Joycie,” Hopper whispered, tucking her head against his chest.

“Okay *Jimmy* ,” she hiccuped and wiped hastily at her tears, a tentative smile breaking through the haze of sadness and alcohol. He was right - there was no way she could have explained herself then. Not with so much hanging in the balance.

Pulled from her reverie, Joyce squeezed her eyes shut as the front door to the house opened and her bedroom door vibrated in its frame. Beyond her room she could hear Hopper mumbling, his low voice quieter and more resigned as he spoke to the kids in the living room. It wasn’t long before he knocked softly on the door, his head poking around the edge before she could reply.

“You’re up,” he stated evenly, stepping into the room and shutting the door behind him.

“Yes, and my head is killing me. So thank you for taking care of them this morning so I could sleep.” She answered with a tightness in her

voice that belied the way she was trying to look nonchalant as she moved to lean against her headboard. His hat was crushed between his hands as he edged around the walls of the room, careful not to step too close for fear of encroaching on the careful boundaries they'd laid. "How much do I owe you for breakfast?" Joyce asked carefully, eyes cast towards the hands she clenched in her lap.

"That's - Joyce," Hopper huffed and groaned, his palm dragging over his face. "I'm not mad at you. I need you to hear that before anything else we say and I want you - no, I need you - to understand that nothing that happened last night changed anything for me. But I also think that we need to talk about this. I can't ignore it because it fucking hurt - "

"Hop," she moaned, her head snapping up at his honesty.

"Let me finish, please," he paused and waited until she nodded in acceptance, her eyes filling with unshed tears at the way he tightly smiled to hide the emotion from his face. "Joy - I would have been there for you - "

"I know - "

"I loved you - "

"I know - "

"Then tell me why you hid it for so long. Why didn't you tell me,

your best friend, the father, what was going on? Why didn't you trust me to be there? Did I do something - say something - to make you think that I was that kind of person? Would you do it again?" He croaked out the last question, his gaze steady as it met hers across the room.

"I would do it again. But - " she sighed and pulled herself free of the comforter, getting to her feet so that she was standing before him, eyes wide as she looked up towards his. "It wasn't you. I was scared. So scared that I would be this teen mom who got knocked up by some poor schmuck who died in a shitty war. I didn't tell you because I barely knew myself before it was all over and by then it didn't seem like the kind of thing you told people. Especially someone who was in a Vietnam. Do you remember those letters you sent home? The ones from after bootcamp? I definitely couldn't tell you after reading those. I couldn't lay that burden on you when you carried so much pain already. So I kept it to myself to save you the heartache because even though I was scared I knew that if I'd had it, if that child had been born, our lives would have been different. I loved you - love you - "

Lifting his hand to her cheek he broke the barrier between them, softening her brow with his thumb as she leaned into him. "I love you too," he murmured, eyes closed as she pressed into his palm.

"I'm sorry I hurt you," Joyce sighs, wrapping her arms around his waist and pulling herself against him. His hands settle against her back, his chin resting on the crown of her head. "I didn't mean for that to happen - the opposite, actually."

"It's alright, Joycie," he chuckles, swaying them back towards the bed until her calves brush against the mattress. "Do you want to have a nap? I'm not going to lie, my liver is still a bit tired from last night

and I could use some quiet after sacrificing myself for your beauty sleep this morning.”

Slapping his arm, Joyce sat down heavily on the bed and pulls him with her until they’re spread sideways across the mess of sheets. “God, yes. But no funny business. We’ll have to make up for that when the kids aren’t a thin wall away.”

“Fine. But just - “ he sneaks in a tentative kiss, eyes searching hers as he leans over her. “I want to seal the deal before you change your mind.”

“I haven’t in thirty years, you think I’m going to up and change my mind now?”